



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Go Fish

This is a fish story about not the one that got away, but the one that got caught and won the trophy. Caught big time, in other words. But it's also a cautionary tale, one about marketing, identity and innocence. *Go Fish* – the movie, the trailer, the legend – wasn't always such. It was once just like its title – derived, presumably, from the beloved children's card game that uses 'Go fish' as a command, but also, more pointedly, from the corny classic sign (gone fishin') hung on office doors throughout America when spring fever, that most uncapitalistic and anti-entrepreneurial syndrome, struck. It's probably fitting, then, that a little, low-budget, black and white independent film with a title signifying 'play' at its least hip, almost provincial best, should have evolved so immediately into a festival hit and legendary deal. This kind of success, after all, is the other kind of American fantasy. But in the process, care has to be taken that the fragile innocence and labour-of-love sincerity of the original doesn't evaporate on its way to the bank. If this article has a hidden agenda, it's the attempt to head off the backlash and argue that this film is far more than any mainstream distributor's fishing expedition.

Go Fish started life as a little film called *Max & Ely*. It was written in Chicago in 1991 by Rose Troche and Guinevere Turner, a couple of twenty-somethings smitten with each other and their project. It was a lesbian film, by and about and for lesbians. As Turner says, it was 'the little film that could'. For a while, though, it couldn't.

In 1992, Roche and Turner ran out of money. Their all-volunteer crew began to lose faith. Everybody had been working for free because they shared the dream of bringing a lesbian cinema into existence. Troche says, 'if you don't think that you can walk up to any lesbian and say, "hey do you want to make a film because look at the shit that's out there?" and they're, like, "I'm with ya"' – well, the consequences go without saying. So when they found themselves with little money, fewer friends and a film only partly made, they sent a letter to Christine Vachon in New York. As bad as things were, there was now a lesbian producer in the US helping independent films (*Poison*, *Swoon*) to get made. And her production partner, Tom Kalin, was a Chicago boy. Vachon read the letter, saw their 20 minutes of film, read the script and signed on. They were back in business.

By 1992, John Pierson's Islet Films came up with completion money and shooting could be finished. By 1993, ex-lovers Turner and Troche were working and playing in New York. Troche was editing the footage, Turner was fine-tuning the voiceovers, and the Sundance Film Festival would soon decide to show the film. As soon as I saw it, fine-cut on an editing table, I was enchanted and started composing catalogue copy in my head: '*Go Fish* begins just about where coming-out films used to end.' I wasn't particularly restrained in my choice of adjectives: wistful, lyrical, seriocomic, fanciful, plus 'an assured cinematic ability to confer grace.'

Go Fish came to Park City, Utah, with high hopes and lots of fears. By the opening day, director/co-screenwriter Rose Troche and actor/co-screenwriter Guinevere Turner had arrived. A box of nail clippers to be distributed as promo hadn't. Troche and Turner wondered if anyone would like their film in

boytown – until its first screening. The crowd went nuts. ‘God, are they hot,’ said the straight women about the lesbians on screen. ‘Give her money to make another one quick,’ said the straight man about the lesbian on stage. Goldwyn made festival history by signing them to a distribution contract on opening weekend.

Then came the marketing. Unprecedented ads matched two women kissing (except that when it’s printed too dark, one looks like a man, intentionally or not) with quirky handwritten copy. Trailers were in the theatres by May, playing back-up to other big-time quality product. Then the press kicked in. Turner, her hair arranged in front of her face like a beaded curtain, had a whole page in *Interview* touting her as a writer to watch; Rose, all pierced and intense-looking, got a pitch in *Rolling Stone* as the hot director for 1994; the two together got the number two slot in the *New Yorker* Talk of the Town section, which would be a major status symbol even if the writer (anonymous, as is customary for Talk contributors, even when Jacqueline Kennedy wrote an item) hadn’t gone on and on about what a good flirt Turner is and how much all the adulation was pleasing Troche and, well, how charmingly full of themselves and hand-rolled cigarettes and beautiful women and Café Tabac these two were. It’s unprecedented respect for a lesbian movie. And bear in mind that *Go Fish* hadn’t even opened.

Go Fish, then, offers up a lovely fable: the little film that is saved from extinction, hits the bull’s-eye and is swept into the marketplace leaving its hardcore fans to worry that the hype might backfire, that the innocence and fervour that are the film’s finest qualities will be mistaken for mere artifice once the context changes.

Today, there’s a locomotion to lesbian and gay film work that’s undeniable. Two years into the ‘New Queer Cinema’, film and video are still taking off, driven by the fuel of political passion and aesthetic urgency. The queers have staked out this historical moment, making sure it doesn’t erode. And the new filmmakers and video artisans are producing their work without compromising stylistic rigour. Who can resist, when there’s a huge audience willing and waiting to respond to less traditional work? There’s nothing like a political movement to make artists responsive and interactive and full of mandates, while audiences full of their own sense of empowerment can be counted on to swell the ranks of the ticket line and bring their own serious demands to the screening (and, sometimes even to the filmmakers themselves).

Finally, critically, not incidentally, a lesbian feature cinema is emerging alongside lesbian video. After years of boys-only filmmaking, *Go Fish* is a lesbian dramatic film to cheer. It’s the flagship for a season already sporting Shu Lea Cheang’s new *Fresh Kill* and Midi Onodera’s just completed *Sadness of the Moon*. If the papers are to be believed, there are already more than a dozen mainstream lesbian films in production or pre-production in Hollywood. If this keeps up, then the 90s may just be the decade of the dyke after all.

B. Ruby Rich, *Sight and Sound*, July 1994

GO FISH

Director: Rose Troche
Production Companies: Can I Watch Pictures, Islet
In association with: KVPI
Executive Producers: Tom Kalin, Christine Vachon
Producers: Rose Troche, Guinevere Turner
Associate Producer: V.S. Brodie
Production Assistants: Rick Powell, Joanne Morton
Assistant Director: Wendy Quinn
Continuity: Rick Powell, Lisa Raymond
Screenplay: Guinevere Turner, Rose Troche
Director of Photography: Ann T. Rossetti
Additional Camera: Jane Jefferies, Rose Troche, Joe Vidal
Lighting Directors: Ann T. Rossetti, Arthur C. Stone
Assistant Camera: Kelly Krotine, Joe Vidal, Mimi Wadell
Gaffer: Joy Castro-Nova
Additional Lighting: Maida Sussman, Elspeth Kydd
Grips: Debbie Snead, Sara Varon, Rebecca McBride, Jan Collins, Walter Youngblood, Tracy Kimme, Oscar Cervera, Joanne Morton, Joanna Brown, Scout, Paul Shabaz, Kevin M. Grubb, Jennifer Allen, JoAnne Willis
Editor: Rose Troche
Assistant Editors: Lisa Hubbard, Jesse Weiner
Titles Created by: Guinevere Turner
Optical Effects: Rose Troche
Opticals: Millenium
Music: Brendan Dolan, Jennifer Sharpe
Additional Music: Scott Aldrich
Additional Guitar for Score: Mark Huston
Musician (Drums): Alexi Hawley
Musician (Violin): Tony Cross
Musician (Bass): More Paladini
Musician (Vocals/Acoustic Guitar): Mila Drumke
Musician (Acoustic Guitar/Slide Guitar): Jennifer Sharpe
Sound Recording: Lisa Hubbard, Elspeth Kydd
Additional Sound: Joe Vidal, Walter Youngblood
Assistant Sound: Joe Vidal, Walter Youngblood
Boom Operators: Jennifer Allen, Theresa Castino, Lisa Gillespie, Kerry Hilgar, Mary Elva Kouklis, Jean Kracher, Julia Lafleur, Diane Swanson, Walter Youngblood
Re-recording Engineer: David Novack
Sound Editor: Missy Cohen
Dialogue Editor: Jacob Ribicoff
Assistant Dialogue Editors: Gillian Chi, Karl Wasserman
ADR Engineers: George Lara, David Novack
Foley Artist: Brian Vancho
Foley Engineer: George Lara

Cast

V.S. Brodie (*Ely*)
Guinevere Turner (*'Max' Kebrina West*)
T. Wendy McMillan (*Kia*)
Migdalia Melendez (*Evy*)
Anastasia Sharp (*Daria*)
Mary Garvey (*student 1/jury member*)
Jennifer Allen (*student 2*)
Walter Youngblood (*student 3*)
Danielia Falcón (*student 3/jury member*)
Arthur C. Stone (*student 4*)
Elspeth Kydd (*angry student*)
Tracy Kimme (*student 5/jury member*)
Brooke Webster (*Mel*)
Mimi Wadell (*Mimi*)
Scout (*hairdresser*)
Susan Gregson (*bride 1/jury member*)
Carolyn Kotlarski (*bride 2/jury member*)
Joanna Brown (*bride 3/jury member*)
Betty Jeannie Pejko (*Evy's mother*)
Alfredo Troche (*Junior*)
JoAnne C. Willis (*Sam*)
Jonathan T. Vincent (*the boy*)
Jamika Ajalon (*jury member 1*)
Michele Cullom (*jury member 2*)
Marianna (*herself*)
Shelly Schneider-Bello (*Bella*)
Stephanie Boles (*Alice*)
Julia Lafleur (*Andy*)
Lisa Raymond (*dinner guest 1*)
Nina Von Voss (*dinner guest 2*)
Dorothea Reichenbacher (*Della*)
Rose Troche (*woman in wedding dream*)

USA 1994

83 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Go Fish Wed 9 Feb 20:40; Sat 26 Feb 18:20
Rope Thu 10 Feb 18:30; Tue 22 Feb 14:30
Victim Thu 10 Feb 20:40; Sun 13 Feb 13:00; Mon 21 Feb 18:00
Desert Hearts Fri 11 Feb 20:40; Wed 16 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Head Librarian Emma Smart)
My Beautiful Laundrette
Sat 12 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 20:45
The Handmaiden (Ah-ga-ssi) Sat 12 Feb 20:10; Sun 27 Feb 17:50
Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit) Sun 13 Feb 15:20
A Fantastic Woman (Una mujer fantástica)
Sun 13 Feb 18:40; Tue 22 Feb 20:50
Maurice Mon 14 Feb 18:00

Beautiful Thing Mon 14 Feb 20:30
All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre) Wed 16 Feb 21:00
Young Soul Rebels Thu 17 Feb 20:45
Mädchen in Uniform Fri 18 Feb 20:30; Sat 26 Feb 16:00
Rent Sun 20 Feb 18:10
Brokeback Mountain Mon 21 Feb 20:25
My Own Private Idaho Wed 23 Feb 18:00 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair)
Moonlight Thu 24 Feb 14:30; Mon 28 Feb 20:45
To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar Fri 25 Feb 20:45
The Watermelon Woman Sat 26 Feb 20:30

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